BIRDS AND ANIMALS IN MUGHAL PAINTING

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The Tartar forebears and Mongol ancestors of the Mughal Emperors were all nomads whose very way of life demand a full knowledge of a number of animals, their nature, habitat breed etc. The Mughal Emperors had inherited a passionate taste for sports and outdoor life — a hangover, as it were from their nomadic pastoral tradition. In fact they were born sportsmen and lovers of nature and animal life, which also implied a strong fondness for birds and animals as well as for the hunt. We were told that they used to make careful studies of specific birds and animals and their emotional responses to them were as strong and often amounted to be the same thing as their spirit of scientific enquiry in this respect. In the sasme way as each of these great emperors possessed a select library of his own, each also had a zoological collection consisting of rare specimens of birds and animals(1). Such collections were even raised into department(2) with a staff of specialists to look after them.

One of the important components of Persian culture as well, was their great repository of animal stories, legend and myth. Many a picture has been drawn with the background of a given story from the bird and animal world. The illustrations in the manuscripts of *the Kalila wa Dimna*, *the Shahnamah* and *the Majnun Laila* may be mentioned by way of example.

The Indian mythology is also rich in stories from the world of animals and birds illustrations from which have been drawn in the oldest indigenous literature. These from the back ground of scenes that form the context of a rich segment of Indian art. They reveal the respect and adoration in which the Hindus held the bird and animal wolrd that was considered as part and parcel of their social and religious life. Even some of the gods and deities of Hindus were imaged after birds and animals.

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(1) Abul Fazl, Ain-i-Akbari, Tr. H. Blochman, Calcutta 1927, pp. 223-226.
(2) **Ibid.**, p. 145.

It was in the midst of such a rich background of the appreciation and adoration of the animal world in its best and widest scene developed through the ages, that the Mughals on their arrival in India found a welcome home and eventually this rich background provided them with materials for cultural assimilation and integration on a large scale and in a deeper significance.

The Mughal school of painting has often been described as colonial school brought into being under the influence and inspiration of Persian artists and Persianized Mughal patrons. As we proceed with this narrative it will be clear that this is the statement of a half truth, for from the beginning products of the Mughal school reveal elements that are not to be found in either Timurid or contemporary Persian paintings, elements such as the quality of the line which invariably has a modelling quality as distinguished from the sharp flatness of the Persian line, a quicker-tempo of composition resulting in a dramatic quality as distinguished from the merely pictorial of Persian art, a broadness of composition and also an expansiveness which were derived directly from murals and not from miniature more roundity of volume, having a plastic quality resulting in the total effect of a more lively naturalism than is ever evident in Persian painting. There are only some of the distinguishing characteristics of Mughal painting even at the earliest stage as witnessed by the paintings of *the Hamza-Nama*. This is not the place to go into this question. though it needs to be emphasized that despite all foreign influences-contemporary Persian and European included — the Mughal school came to acquire an independent entity of its own, with its own creative forms, pattern and designs and affiliated itself in course of time with the indigenous classical Indian tradition.

Indeed, one of the basic qualities that distinguished Mughal painting from contemporary Iranian, is their lively naturalism, not often disassociated from elements of dramatization, and nowhere is the quality so evident as in the delineation of birds and animals. They are usually represented with great sympathy and understanding, surpassing the products of all other contemporary school in this field. It is also particularly interseting because of individual portraiture of birds and animals depicted for their own sake — a theme not so prominent in any other school. There is also a variety of birds and animals illustrated in albums and manuscripts of texts dealing with history, poltry, mythology fables and science which help one to recall many aspects of Mughal social and military life.

The literary output of the age of the Mughals is rich in illustrated manuscripts which represent birds and animals in defferent position and modes of living. In the works of fables, like the *Kalila wa Dimna*, *Anwar-i-Suhaili*, *Iyar-i-Danish* etc., we find them in groups engaged in various actions and even in discussions according to the needs of the stories which are highly suggestive and full of morals and instructions of various kinds not excluding what may be termed the "laws of polity". It may be pointed out that the fables referred to above are based upon Hindu folklore such as contained in the *Hitopadisa* and *Panchantantra* which were translated into Persian. It was the traditional Indian attitude towards bird and animal life that was sought to be captured in the paintings through the fables themselves. In all such groups birds and animals are carefully depicted with minute and skilful draughtsmanship and the representation of each species was marked with individuality.

Beside, we have paintings of birds as decorative pieces in the body of the text of exquisite manuscripts such as *Gulistan-i-Saadi* of the Royal(3) Asiatic society, London, on every page of which is a number of little birds painted (Figs. 1-2) and the manuscript of *Diwani-i-Hafez* which is preserved in the British Museum (or 7573), (Fig. 3). Occasionally the margins of the pages are depicted and decorated in gold with varied birds and animals in all their vividness amongst rocks, trees and foliage — all their lively naturalism, pursuing each other, fighting, running and resting. A good example of the above is the Baharistan(4) manuscript (Fig. 4) Gulistan(5) manuscript. (Fig. 5) and Jahangir's(6) Album, (Fig. 6). Moreover, the Mughals made studies of birds and animals as data for natural history as we see in the remarkable manuscript of the Ajaib-al-Makhbekat(7) (Fig. 7).

As a matter of fact the Mughals chronicled to us civilization of the times in all its aspects, not only in words but also in painting and illustrated many scenes from public and private life in which animal life had its full nature play in scenes of durbars, social gatherings and picnics, ceremonies, sports and hunting, battles and seiges etc. One might almost say that the history of

(3) This manuscript is loaned to the British Museum (or 62).

(4) This manuscript is preserved at Bodleian Library, Oxford (Elliot 254).

(5) This manuscript is also preserved at Bodleian Library, Oxford (Persad 43) and bears the seal of Zaib al-Nisa, daughter of Aurangzeb.

(6) This album is preserved in the State Library, Berlin, vide Kuhnel and Goets, **Indian Book painting from Jahangir's album in the state Library, Berlin,** London 1926.

(7) Thomas Arnold and J.V.S. Wilkinson, **The Library of A. Chester Beatty. A Catalogue of the Indian Miniature,** London 1936, Vol. I, pp. 26-27.

the school of Mughal Painting in the History of the Mnghal emperors themselves.

India offered to the Mughal artists her rich fauna and the richness of Zooligical specimens were fully utilized as materials to illustrate the manuscripts, memoirs, albums and compilations of the Indian specimens-elephant, lion, tiger, deer, monkey, leopard, rhinoceros, bull, buffalo, saras, pheasant, falcon and other different kinds of birds and animals. Occasionally, respresentations were also made of zebra, giraffe, turkey-cock, camel, horse, etc. which were not indigenous animals and were imported from other countries. These birds and animals were depicted with great understanding in their realistic normal life, habits, trends and emotions. Almost usually they were depicted in profile, through back and front views and even three-quarters have been presented occasionally.

It is quite evident that the earliest phase of Mughal painting had been influenced by Persian tradition and styles since the artists that worked in the court atelier followed the instructions and the Persian ways in painting-line and technique from such master artists as Mir sayyid Ali and Abdu-Samad of Shiraz who directed and supervised the work of the atelier. The Indian painters were quick to assimilate the Persian characteristics, and on the other hand, the Persian mind was not slow to grasp the ideal of Indian art. In the royal atelier, where the artists of two traditions — Persian and Indian — Collaborated the congenial atmosphere of a mutual exchange of ideas, paved the way for the development of a synthetic and homogenous school having its own distinctive style and character.

At the early stage of Mughal painting birds and animals depicted in the Persian style appear in good many pictures.

It will not be out of place to say a few words regarding the animals in Persian Painting. Paintings of animals in the Persian school are purely linear, pictorial and decorative. For example, the horse which is the most important animal represented in Persian painting is a good specimen of drawing but only in a decorative way; it is conventional and stylized and have more or less a contour without any suggestion of depth or of relief. The legs are slim and thin, and are strongly in contrast with the heavy body. The head with a muzzle like that of a crocodile, has a form which is characteristic of the horse in Persian Painting. In the colour of the horse again the Persian artist does not try

to follow the natural colours and gives the animal such colours as suit the composition of the picture and its harmony.

The first notable examples of the Mughal school of painting are supplied by the illustration of the *Hamza-nama*[8]. Birds and animals are represented in this immortal work usually according to the Persian style and technique, but here and there one can detect examples of traditional Indian hands that drew and painted animals in the traditional Indian manner, that is in their lively naturalism. But a deviation from the Persian standard may be recognised in colour treatment. We do no longer find horses with such fantastic colours as had been characteristic in Persian art. Rather, the Mughal artists tried to reproduce the natural colours of the horse, but the execution remains flat and one can hardly see the light shadows that distinguish the different parts of the body and impart relief to the representation. The delineation of other kinds of animlas runs on similar lines, as may be seen in the hunting scenes depicted after Persian style showing horses galloping with riders on their back and animals fleering at top speed. With the gradual emergence of Indian ideals the Persian tradition and ways weaken also. Further, an increasing knowledge of the Indian fauna and a gradual reassertion of Indian style and technique in respect of birds and animals facilitates a more naturalistic rendering after various specimens and some of the representations of birds and animals, left by the Mughal artists, may justly be regarded as among the mosst successful portraits because of fine rendering not only of physiognomy but also of characters.

A new and naturalistic treatment of birds and animals becomes more and more apparent towards the close of the reign of Akbar and the representations take a more vivid character. They are no longer conventional. The artists appear to have discarded the Persian conventions. The old Indian ideal of naturalistic rendering becomes more and more felt. The artist without following any convention, tries to study life from nature and to understand the nature, ways and habits of the subject depicted. An intimate knowledge and a deep sympathy and understanding of the subject enable the artist to rise above imposed conventions and to leave a faithful rendering of the subject.

To jahangir's innate love of nature added a scientific curiosity and to this aesthete emperor the Mughal school owes its

(8) Vide. Heinrich Gluck, Die Indiechen Miniaturen des Haemza Romanes, Wien — Zurich, 1925.

highest achievements. The scientific bent of his mind inspired him to commission faithful records of whatever appeard to him curious in nature. A significant passage in his memoirs may be quoted in this connection.

"Although King Babar had described in his memoirs the appearance and the shapes of several animals, he had never ordered the painters to make pictures of them. As these animals appeared to me to be very strange, I both described them and ordered that painters should draw them in the jahangirnama so that the amazement that arose from hearing of them might be increased[9]".

As a matter of fact jahangir was not only a passionate connoisseur of art and enthusiastic lover of the beauties of nature, but also very fond of collecting rare birds and animals of all kinds. In all his travels he was accompanied by some of his gifted artists and they executed under the royal command whatever beautiful and curious things caught the royal fancy.

The 'jahangiri period' is considered to be the golden age in the Mughal school of painting. This phase is particularly brilliant in the production of not a few individual portraits of birds and animals, that have been regarded as materpieces in the Mughal school. (Figs. 8-9-10-11). Fortunately some of these portraits bear signatures which help us to identify the respective authors and among them may be mentioned the renowned Mansur, Manohar Abul Hassan. Inayat and Murad. They were specialistis in painting birds and animals and devoted their talent and skill to portraying the fauna in its various forms and species. The conventional way of depicting birds and animals did not satisfy these artists who tried their best to attain perfection and exactitude. They successfuly depicted the outlines of each and every part in a naturalistic manner and the individual physiognomy as much as possible objectively. Because of their accuracy and skilfulness one can almost count the number of the feathers and the spots on the skin of the animals painted. Some of these fauna were depicted for the first time such as the turkey-cock (Fig. 12) and the zebra (Fig. 13) which were new to India. The way of depicting animals in profile largely used in Indian painting is seen in most of these portraits. In fact a distinctive contour which delimits the body with great care gives full expression to the form of the animal. Sometimes to bring into relief certrain parts of the body of the animal the artist clours them differently from the rest of the

(9) Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri. Tr. A. Rogers. London 1909, Vol. I. p. 215.

body making these whitish and sometimes golden brown. Full use of the tonality of colour is sought to be made. Thus the artist succeeds to a very great extent in giving depth and volume to the picture of the animal.

It is said that the jahangiri school of painting was influenced by European principles of painting. But European elements are limited to the slight influence in treatment, of the perspective, pysage, scenery and have hardly anything to do with the representation of birds and animals. European influence in Mughal painting is a much debated question, but has no relevancy as far as the painting of birds and animals is concerned.

The jahangiri tradition of painting birds and animals continued during the reign of Shahjahan. The horse, a frequently represented animal during Shahjahan's period, is characterised by a majestic bearing with a stout body and limbs in contradistinction to that of the horses depicted in the early stages of the Mughal school. The well-known painting[10] of the three princes Shya, Aurangzeb and Murad on horseback (Fig. 14), illustrates the treatment of horse at its best. Though shown in identical attitudes and movements presenting more or less a decorative uniformity, the sweeping curves of the neck and the back in each fully bring out the spirited bearing of the noble animals to which the straight and stiff attitude of the legs supply a great contrast. To a certain extent there is an attempt at modelling which indicates an advance on the tradition as seen in the jahangiri period. The treatment of the other animals continued on the previous level.

The decline of the Mughal school of painting set in with the accession of Aurangzeb. The art of painting continued, but having lost royal patronage which was responsible for the supreme achievements of the school during the previous three reigns, it is apparent that the creative phase was over. Even during the reign of Shahjahan whose interest was taken up more by architecture, the art of painting remained compartively neglected. But the standard reached during jahangir's time was maintained. Aurangzeb's policy was opposed to the pursuit of this art which he characterised to beagainst the tenets of Islam. Paintings of birds and animals continued to be produced, but they were all stylized and stereotyped lacking the masterly characterisation that we recognise in the creations of the Akbar and jahangir periods, or even of that of Shahjahan. With the disruption of the empire after Aurangzeb every hope of a revival was gone and the Mughal tradition declined rapidly.

(10) Indian Section. Victoria and Albert Museum, Pl. I,M. 13, 1925.

معصیت از هر که صادر شود ناپسند است و از علما ناخوب‌تر که علم

سلاح جنگ شیطانست و خداوند سلاح را چون باسیری برند شرمساری

زیادت کند

عامی نادان پریشان روزگار

به ز دانشمند ناپرهیزکار

کان به نابینایی از راه اوفتاد

وین دو چشمش بود و در چاه اوفتاد

جان در حمایت یکدمست

و دنیا وجودی میان دو عدم دین به دنیا فروشان خرند یوسف را

بفروشند تا چه خرند قوله تعالی الم اعهد الیکم یا بنی آدم ان

لا تعبدوا الشیطان انه لکم عدو مبین شیطان

با مصلحان بر نمی آید و سلطان با مفلس

وامش مده آنکه بی نمازست

گرچه دهنش ز فاقه بازست

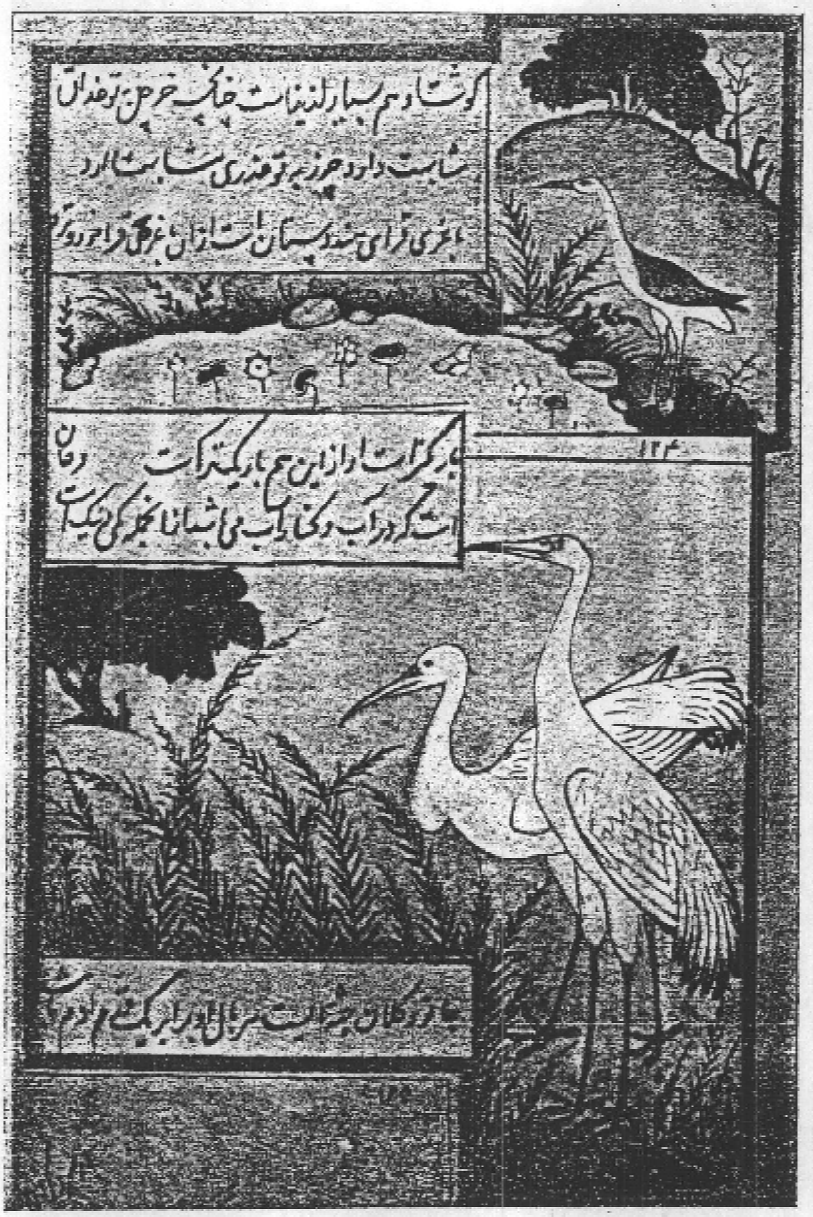
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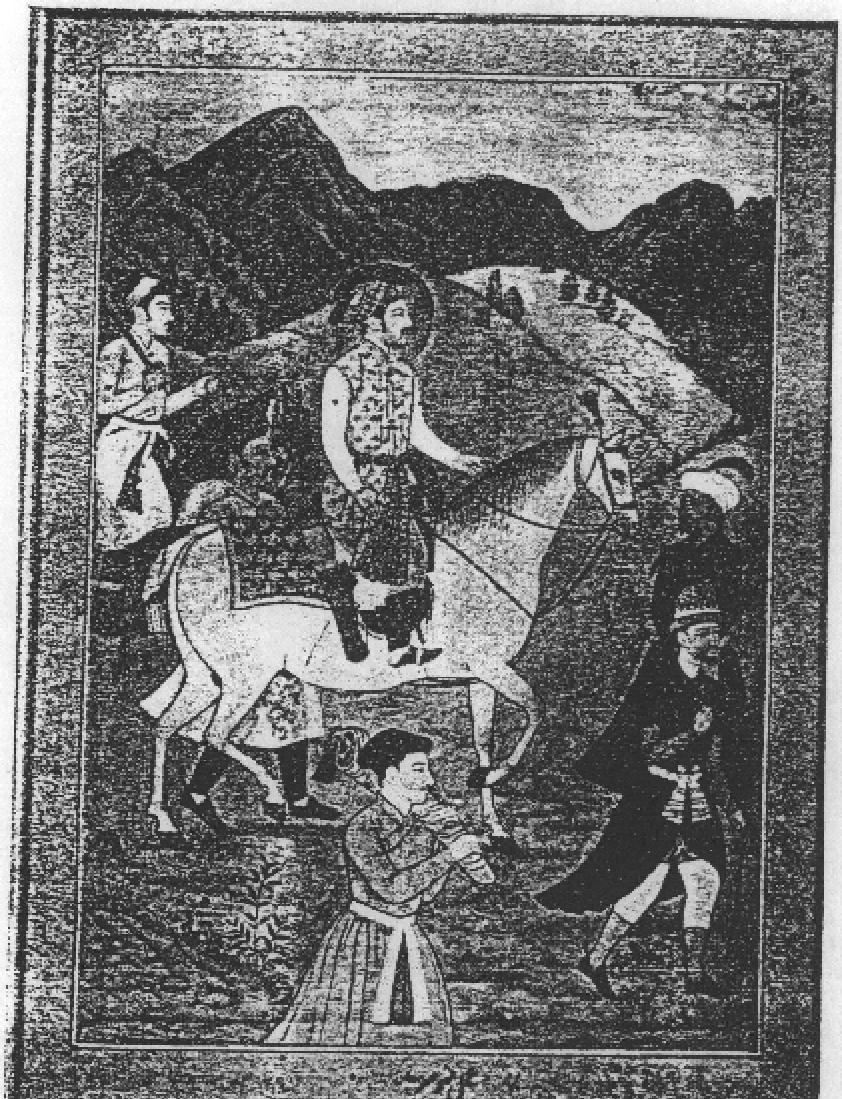
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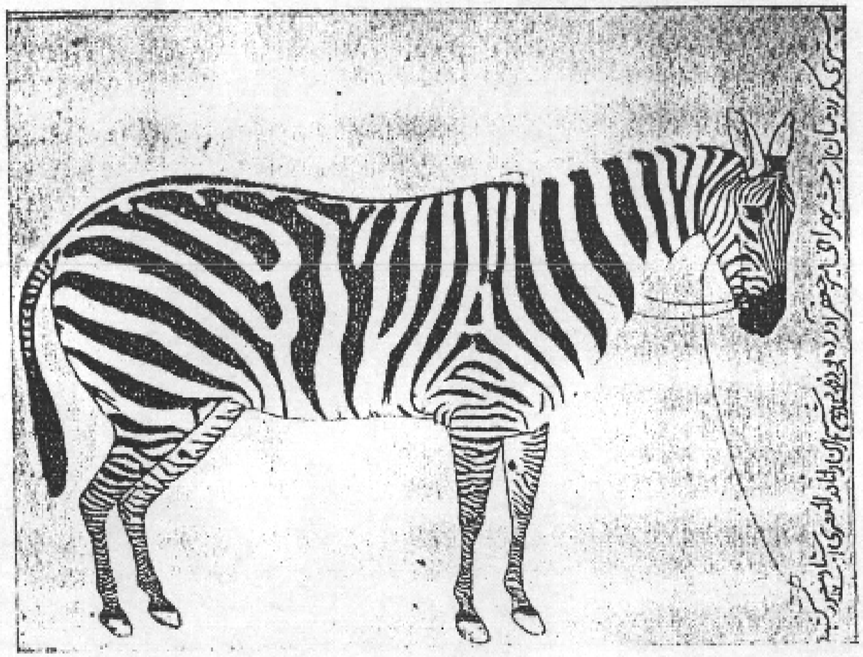

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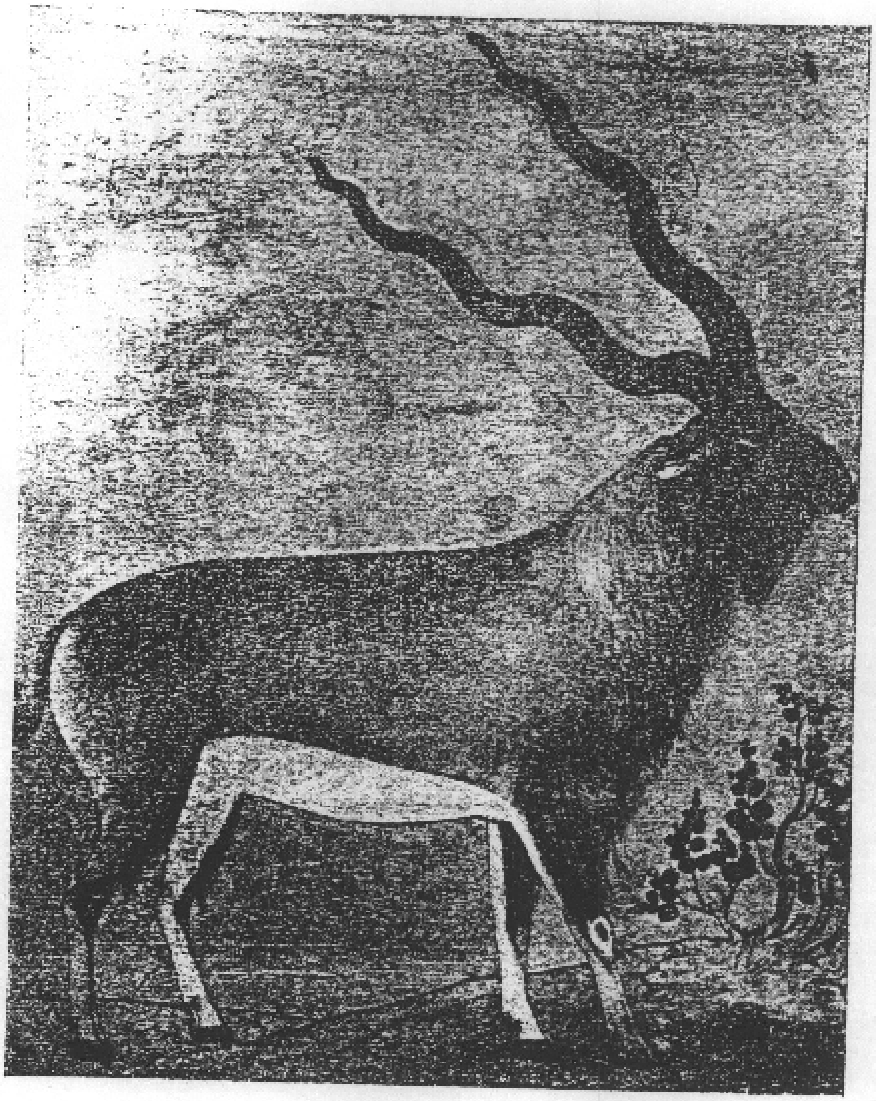

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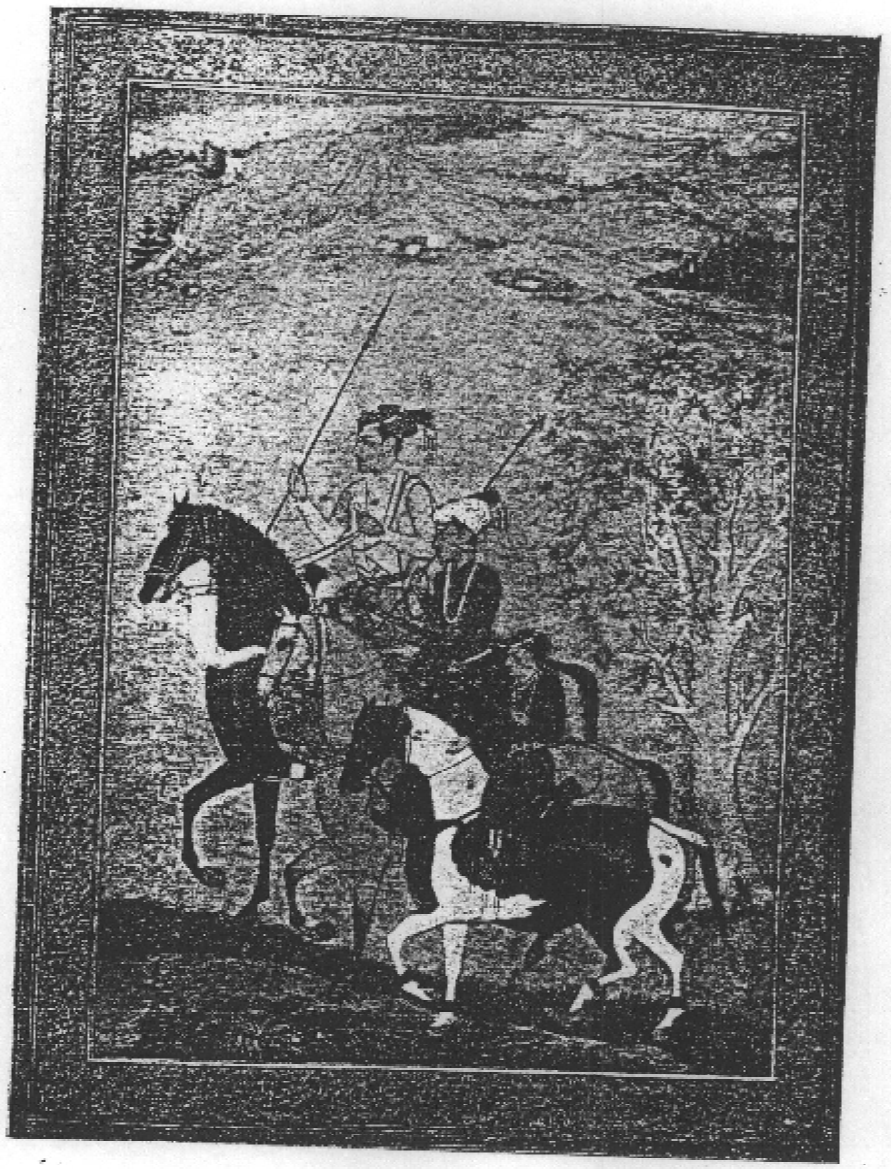












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وصف عهد زمان حیاتو راشا | که درین مزرعه خود دانه خوش کشت
| که بگلشن شد و از گلخن درد بهشت



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